

THE

Things Methodists Believe

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CONTENTS.

THE THINGS METHODISTS BELIEVE	PAGE.
I. In Common with All Christians.....	5
II. As Distinct from What Baptists Believe. . .	11
III. As Distinct from What Presbyterians Believe.	15
IV. As Distinct from What Episcopalian Believers.	18
V. As Distinct from What Roman Catholics Believe	20
VI. As Distinct from All Others.	22
Conclusion	25
	(3)

THE THINGS METHODISTS BELIEVE.

I. In Common with All Christians.

IT is certainly a condition greatly to be desired that Methodists, and members of all Churches, indeed, should be well informed as to the teachings of their Church, and of the points wherein they both agree and differ with other Churches which surround them. The need of some simple statement, serviceable to this end—inexpensive, concise, for distribution among Methodists—has been recognized by pastors and emphasized in portions of our Church press for some time. Individual members also have expressed a desire for something which would clearly set before them where they stand, and give them a reason for the faith that is in them. Yet nothing exactly meeting this need has been found available.

So the plan suggested itself of briefly setting forth what Methodists believe (1) in common with all Christians; (2) as distinct from what Baptists believe; (3) as distinct from what Presbyterians believe; (4) as distinct from what Episcopalianists believe; (5) as distinct from what Roman Catholics believe; (6) as distinct from all others.

First, then, what are the things Methodists believe in common with all Christians? It will perhaps be surprising to some who are forever talking about "the divisions of Christendom" to find how really united we are upon all of the great fundamentals, including everything essential to a godly life and salvation. We have sought in the statement which follows to avoid every word which suggests denominational bias, and to prepare a statement which Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Catholics, and all orthodox Christians, indeed, might assent to as an expression of their fundamental faith; reserving, however, the right to make such additions as their convictions might necessitate—*e. g.*, limiting the atonement, or making it specifically universal, making more numerous the sacraments, or being more specific as to modes of administration, orders, etc.

Upon the truths that follow we believe the Christian world has ever been agreed. However, we make no pretensions of writing a creed for the Churches; we are writing only a tract for the times.

A STATEMENT OF CHRISTIAN FAITH.

1. *Concerning God.*

We believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, "who in perfect wisdom, holiness, and love pervades, sustains, and rules the world which he has made."

And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord, who

was in glory with the Father before all worlds, and who, in the infinite love of the Father and the Son, for us men and our salvation, counted not his divine glory a prize to be selfishly held fast, but emptied himself and became partaker of man's nature; was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary; revealed in one holy life God to men and how men should live to God; died the just for the unjust, as an atonement for sin; rose again from the dead the third day; and by his life, death, and resurrection established a way by which men may obtain forgiveness of sins, purity of heart, and blessedness forever.

And in the Holy Ghost, proceeding from the Father and the Son, very and eternal God, by whose operation on men dead in trespasses and sin they are quickened to repentance, faith, and loving obedience, and are made partakers of the divine nature.

2. Concerning the Scriptures.

That these truths concerning God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost are revealed to us in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, written by holy men of old as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, and given by God to be to man for all time a full and sufficient revelation of all things pertaining to God, man, duty, and destiny needful for faith and practice; that the Holy Spirit enables men to apprehend these truths as they search the Scriptures in humility.

3. Of Man's Sin.

We believe that man was created originally in the image of God, with intellect, sensibility and will, and a moral nature pure and capable of having been maintained so by a constant choice of the good in obedience to God; but that through distrust of God, expressing itself in disobedience to him, man fell from this holy estate, and the moral image of God was destroyed in him, whereby he "is very far gone from original righteousness, and of his own nature inclined to evil, and that continually."

4. God's Grace.

That were it not for the grace of God, revealed in Christ, there would be no impulse now in any heart to turn again to God and righteousness; but that through this grace of God, revealed in Christ, God seeks and has been seeking through all time to draw men again unto himself, restoring in them his lost image, and fitting them for yet partaking of that blessedness and fellowship which he designed for them in their creation.

5. Man's Freedom.

That man may respond to or resist this grace of God, freedom of choice being an essential attribute of his nature, which God himself could not fail to regard without destroying his personality and the possibility of any real virtue. To force goodness upon man would be to destroy the possibility of good-

ness for man, except as the sheep is good and the lily pure.

6. Of Salvation.

That, where there is response on the part of man to this divine impulse, he comes to hate iniquity and love righteousness, to recognize the defilement of his own nature, the power of sin in his life, and his need of a Deliverer; and that, trusting in Jesus Christ as the world's Redeemer and his Saviour, he finds peace with God and spiritual renewal. "Wherefore that we are justified by faith only is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort."

7. Of Damnation.

That, where there is resistance of man to this drawing of God, those doing so reveal themselves thereby as at enmity with God and righteousness and rebels in his universe. Where such resistance is persisted in it can only result in the everlasting banishment of that soul from God, in misery and woe, as is plainly set forth in the Scriptures.

8. Obedience.

That it is incumbent upon all those who have been restored through faith in Jesus Christ to God's fellowship and favor to order their lives in obedience to God's Word, following the example of their Lord and Saviour who did no sin, and who went about doing good.

9. The Church.

"That the regenerate are the true Church, to which, among other sacred obligations, is committed the task (in the power of the Holy Ghost) of transforming the world morally and socially into the kingdom of God."

10. The Sacraments.

That the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper were instituted by Christ "not only as badges or tokens of Christian men's profession, but also as signs of grace, by the which he doth work invisibly in us, and doth not only quicken but also strengthen and confirm our faith in him."

Baptism with water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost is commanded by Christ, and is a sign of regeneration or the new birth.

The Lord's Supper, a partaking of bread and wine together, is not only a sign of the love that Christians ought to have among themselves one to another, but also is a sacrament of our redemption by Christ's death and a memorial thereof till he come.

11. The Judgment.

That Christ shall come again in glory at the end of the world to judge the world in righteousness; that there shall then be a resurrection of all men from the dead, to receive final awards, according to the deeds done in the body, whether they be good or whether they be evil.

12. The State.

That, as respects civil affairs, it is as truly the duty of every Christian to "render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's" as "unto God the things that are God's."

II. As Distinct from What Baptists Believe.

1. That pouring, sprinkling, and immersion are all scripturally proper modes of baptism, and that insistence upon baptism by immersion only is an emphasis, contrary to the spirit of the New Testament and unjustified in the New Testament, upon the merely outward mode of symbolizing an inward grace. While all Christians agree that Christ commands baptism, using water "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," yet we emphatically deny that he specified a mode, and that immersion is essential to obedience. Those as truly "obey Christ in baptism" who, confessing him as Lord and Saviour, are baptized by pouring or sprinkling (the Bible is full of allusions to these as symbolizing cleansing) as do those who are baptized by immersion. They have, further, the advantage of being less likely to make their faith center around and in the observance of a mere outward rite than are those who give to the mode such overshadowing emphasis.

2. That its ministers, and the ministers of all denominations, who are called of God to this holy office, are as truly ministers of Jesus Christ as are those

ordained by the Baptist Church, and when so authorized by their respective Churches are as truly empowered to administer the sacraments, and these sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper are as valid when administered by them as by a Baptist preacher. The claim of the Baptist Church to these rights exclusively, and the rejection by them of even immersion when administered by a preacher not of their communion, Methodists look upon as an assumption of exclusive rights in the kingdom of God unparalleled (even Roman Catholics admit the validity of alien baptism), and which the Christian charity and catholicity of other Christian ministers and Churches must pardon and be brotherly still.

3. That there is no justification in the New Testament; further, that it is contrary to the spirit of Christian unity constantly enjoined by Christ to exclude from the sacrament of the Lord's Supper those who would come in reverence and faith, merely because they differ in conviction as to matters of outward administration. That to do so is to manifest the spirit of the sons of Zebedee, whom Christ rebuked for their exclusiveness.

Such doctrines, both as regarding ministerial rights, baptism, and the Lord's Supper, it is painful even to state, and to be rejected they need but to be known. *They will certainly one day have to be discarded even by Baptists themselves, when Christ crowns as his own ministers and men of all faiths, baptized by all*

modes, and when he invites all alike to sit down together to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

4. Methodists hold further, as distinct from Baptists, that, having once entered into a state of grace, it is possible to fall therefrom. The same free choice through which one becomes united to Christ remains after conversion, and it is man's melancholy prerogative to depart from God through spiritual neglect or through sinful indulgence. This is written large upon the pages of Scripture, the most explicit statements of it possible being given at length (as in Ezekiel xviii. 24-32, xxxiii. 12-18), and the constant exhortations to watchfulness, to prayerfulness, to keep the body under lest we ourselves (even St. Paul) should be cast away—all are in evidence of the possibility of apostasy, not only of drawing back, but of "drawing back unto perdition," as is specifically stated time and again. To answer that those whose "lamps were gone out" never had any oil, or that those that work iniquity will be saved despite the fact that the contrary is specifically stated in the Scriptures, is the argument of one desperate in defeat.

5. Lastly, as distinct from Baptists, Methodists believe, with Presbyterians, Episcopalian, Congregationalists, Lutherans, Roman and Greek Catholics—in fact, with forty-nine fiftieths of Christendom—in the baptism of infants. As of old they brought "their babes" to Jesus, as the Greek word indicates (Luke xviii. 15), so we still bring ours, assured that the Mas-

ter approves and blesses them and rebukes those who rebuke us. And as baptism is the symbol of acceptance and grace and blessing, we baptize them, admitting that they cannot understand, but assured that bringing our children thus into covenant relations with God and taking upon ourselves the obligation of teaching them the meaning of the rite and the truths of our holy religion, hoping and praying that they may embrace them and ratify our action in later years, has behind it the scriptural precedent of circumcision, commanded of God throughout Hebrew history—the words of Christ as he said, “Suffer the little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven;” several instances of “household” baptisms, which imply the baptism of infants, and the practice of the Christian Church from the earliest centuries. Certainly if pouring or sprinkling is not baptism, nor the baptism of infants, we face the anomaly of heaven full of unbaptized persons, for an overwhelming majority of Christians in every age have been baptized in no other manner.

6. As to Church government, it is well known that Methodists have always followed and prefer in the United States an episcopal form of government, as being both scriptural and effective; comparable not to a monarchy, as is sometimes claimed, but to such a republic as we live in, with men elected to office and to membership in Conferences, and they exercis-

ing such appointive or legislative powers as have thereby been conferred upon them. The Baptists maintain a democracy so absolute as to be almost without a parallel in history, each local Church refusing to allow any delegated and representative body to legislate for it.

III. As Distinct from What Presbyterians Believe.

1. That Christ died for *all* mankind and not for the elect only, and that he draws *all* men by his Spirit with what may be an effectual calling, if they will only respond thereto. That an unconditional foreordination and election of some to everlasting life, and foreordination of others to everlasting punishment by withholding from them an effectual call, is a limitation of the atonement and of the love and mercy of God, unjustified by the scriptural revelation which God gives to us of himself and of his Son. We believe, too, that to hold such is to place the blame for sin and neglect of salvation not upon the sinner, but upon God, who withholds from him those spiritual aspirations and impulses which alone would enable him to repent and believe.

2. As to Divine Sovereignty, we believe that God had a purpose and design in creation, and that this purpose and design he is seeking to work out in human history; that his purpose and design for every man is good, but that through freedom man may, and often has and does, frustrate and make impossible

the fulfillment of all these gracious purposes through willful disobedience and rebellion. To teach otherwise seems to us to make God the author of sin, and makes the wickedness of earth and the misery of hell, alike with the glory of heaven, that which he desired, designed, decreed, and brought to pass. We know of no finer statement of what Methodists believe on this subject than the following extract from "The Christian Faith," by Dr. Olin A. Curtis: "Let us now try to look at the final universe from God's point of view. His final universe will not be what he most profoundly wanted; it will not be his ideal realized. God wanted a final universe comprehending every moral person created, all these created persons in a voluntary service of holy purport, and all this eternal service resplendent and enraptured with the holy vision of God. . . . But God saw his ideal plan in wreck through the very freedom absolutely necessary to its actualization. Sin has destroyed the possibility of our finest eternity. Sin will not be triumphant; but sin has infringed the dream, has placed the glory of the outcome in everlasting check." If it is objected that such is to destroy the sovereignty of God, we answer: Not so; it was his sovereign will which made us free, and his sovereign power will at last put all enemies under his feet. He cannot and should not force men to do his will, but he can and should and will condemn them when they stubbornly refuse. "All evil in pos-

sibility was the awful price God had to pay for any personal sainthood."

3. The final perseverance of the saints, a doctrine logically following the conception of God's sovereignty as held by Presbyterians, Methodists cannot accept either on rational or on scriptural grounds. For it implies that with conversion human freedom ceases; that God has got you and he is going to hold you, whether you will or not. Such we believe to be unreasonable and unscriptural, both the Old Testament and the New Testament being full of passages to the effect that, though

"The soul that on Jesus still leans for repose
He will not, he will not desert to its foes,"

yet we may forsake him even after having been once enlightened and been made partakers of the Holy Ghost (Heb. vi. 4-6), and that "the last state of that man is worse than the first" (Luke xi. 26). For "it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them." (2 Pet. ii. 21, 22.)

4. As to regeneration, Presbyterians are more indefinite in their teaching than are most Christian bodies, though they strongly hold to the necessity of regenerating grace for salvation. But whether the seeds both of repentance and faith are implanted in the hearts of elect infants by the secret operation of

the Spirit, as some have taught, or whether this takes place in later years, is a point on which the Church is silent. Methodists have never taught regeneration in infancy, but that regeneration in the full Christian sense takes place only as, in conscious need, the soul cleaves to Christ as a personal Saviour. All agree, however, that the Holy Spirit begins his work in earliest years; to be continued as the child grows and is instructed until it comes, unless disobedient, to a full and conscious experience of salvation through personal faith.

5. As to Church government, Presbyterians differ from Methodists in rejecting the episcopal mode of government, though they delegate legislative and judicial powers to Presbyteries, Synods, and General Assemblies to a degree far in excess of that conceded by Baptists. They recognize also the ministerial rights and offices of other Churches.

IV. As Distinct from What Episcopalian Believe.

1. As to apostolic succession, Episcopalian maintain that their ministry has been empowered to exercise the functions thereof by the laying on of hands of bishops in succession from the apostles themselves, though it is very generally admitted that no such unbroken succession can be traced. They, therefore, claim to be, to a degree excelling all others except Roman Catholics, empowered to exercise the office of the ministry and to be the Church of God;

not to the extent, however, to which the Baptists go, of denying the validity of baptism administered by the ministers of other communions, or of requiring that candidates be rebaptized. Methodists deny the validity of the claim to unbroken succession from the apostles, and its importance even if admitted. They maintain that true apostolic succession, acceptable to God, is partaking of the spirit of the apostles and carrying forward in faith and love, under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, the work which they began on earth.

2. Episcopalians believe also, in an unqualified sense, in baptismal regeneration, and hold that baptism with water and renewal by the Holy Ghost are coincident. Consequently the baptized children of the Church they look upon as already saved, needing only instruction and confirmation as qualifying them for full membership. Methodists place greater emphasis upon the need of a "change of heart" for all, after they come to years of accountability, and to a definite profession of faith on acceptance into Church membership. Consequently Episcopalians have never been as evangelical as Methodists either in doctrine or religious effort.

3. Methodists deny that ministers to-day can rightly be termed "priests," as having neither the rights of offering sacrifice or forgiving sins, to which appellation Episcopalians hold. Except in high Church circles, however, no sacrificial priestly function is ad-

mitted, and the rite of absolution is performed only in a qualified sense. The altar, symbolizing sacrifice, is retained in all Episcopalian churches, yet not as having thereon (as in Roman Catholic churches) the very body and blood of Christ; and before this altar the priest ministers, as in a spiritual sense mediating between God and the people. The use of vestments and of a more elaborate ritual is also an obvious, though not essential, difference between Methodists and Episcopalians.

4. Methodists and Episcopalians agree in having an episcopal mode of government; though in the Episcopal Church each bishop is limited in jurisdiction to a particular and permanent diocese, while in the Methodist Church they are elected as overseers of the Church at large, with such jurisdiction over different portions of the Church from time to time as may seem best for the promotion of its welfare. Episcopal bishops possess no such appointive power over the clergy as do Methodist bishops.

V. As Distinct from What Roman Catholics Believe.

Catholics would, in general, agree on all points indicated at the beginning of this paper, as held by Methodists "in common with all Christians," though all along they would add matters of faith which Methodists and all Protestants reject. To the Holy Scriptures, as the rule of faith and practice, they would add the traditions of the Catholic Church

as of like validity. To the doctrines of man's fall and redemption through grace in Christ Jesus they would add—now in an undertone, formerly in unmistakable terms—that this grace of God is mediated by and through the Roman Catholic Church only, which is the vicegerent of Christ upon earth, with the Pope as its infallible head.

They hold that salvation is by both faith and works; that works of supererogation are possible; and that through the Church the excess of good works of the saints may be transmitted to the sinful. The piety of saints is also supposed to make their prayers of special avail with God; so prayers to the saints and to the Virgin Mary are permissible, seeking intercession through them. The worshiping and adoration of images and relics (with that portion of the Ten Commandments forbidding the making of graven images and bowing down to them left out of their Bible) is permitted and justified.

To the two sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper they add five more—confirmation, penance, orders, matrimony, and extreme unction—and upon these sacraments great emphasis is placed. Baptism efficaciously works regeneration within all who are baptized; practically all are baptized in infancy; so the evangelical Christian doctrine of conversion is almost unknown. The priest in the Mass performs the priestly function of offering up, in the elevation of the host, time and again the sacrifice of Christ to

God, at which the people bow in worship of the host as God. Upon the congregation the priest pronounces absolution of sins, and at the Confessional in private—the priest thus standing between man and God, and the people approaching God and receiving blessings from him through the priest. So in extreme unction, at the point of death, the priest, with olive oil consecrated by a bishop, anoints with much ceremony and Latin quotations various parts of the body (eyes, ears, mouth, nose, feet, etc.), washing away sin, confirming the soul of the sick man, and assuring him of God's mercy.

And even beyond the grave, to our doctrines of heaven and hell they add a doctrine of Purgatory in whose fires the souls of all imperfect Christians are to be purified and fitted for heaven.

To all of which, including their forbidding of the clergy to marry, Methodists and Protestants in general reply, in the language of the Thirty-Nine Articles: "Such are fond things, vainly invented, and grounded upon no warranty of Scripture, but rather repugnant to the Word of God."

VI. As Distinct from All Others.

In point of emphasis Methodism has proclaimed the doctrine of "the witness of the Spirit," or the full assurance of faith as the rightful heritage of all believers, to a degree beyond any other Church; and especially was this true in her early history. Then

for any one to affirm, "I know my sins forgiven, and have the assurance that I am a child of God," was looked upon as presumption in the extreme; and much persecution of early Methodists was because they dared to affirm out of a conscious experience that they had found peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. It was not that such was believed impossible to saints, but that such gracious dispensations were not permitted to ordinary mortals. In illustration, Samuel Wesley, the father of John and Charles, admitted, after Methodism arose, that for twenty-five years he had enjoyed the peace of God, but that he kept it secret as a special manifestation of divine grace to him. His last words were: "The inner witness, my son, the inner witness—that is the proof, the strongest proof, of Christianity." Methodism has brought the possibility of a conscious experience of salvation by all believers to world-wide recognition; and the calling of men to seek and obtain this has been largely the secret of her power. Her emphasis has thus been upon experience and a renewed heart and life more than upon any doctrinal system or outward modes of administration.

It has also been the glory of Methodism to proclaim and emphasize one doctrine as capable of actual realization which others have looked upon only as a Christian ideal beyond reach in this life—that is, the doctrine of Christian perfection, or entire sanctification. Methodists have had the temerity to believe

that when Christ commanded, "Be ye therefore perfect," "Be ye holy," "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart," he meant it; and he could not have meant it if he knew that he spoke of something beyond attainment. So Methodism teaches that there is a state of grace attainable in this life in which purity, goodness, and love reign in the heart alone; that the tempers are all holy, the motives are all pure; and that this entire sanctification should be sought by all Christians. The early Methodists taught also that testimony in humility to having been delivered from all evil by the grace of God is appropriate in those possessing and maintaining this experience. It guarded this doctrine, however, against the objection that it places one beyond temptation by admitting that "the unclean spirit, though driven out, may return and enter again" unless kept out by constant watchfulness and prayer; the inference that prayer for forgiveness is no longer necessary, by admitting that mistakes of judgment and unconscious defections from the perfect law of God yet occur, making ever appropriate the prayer, "Forgive us our trespasses."

Wesley exhorted his preachers to "preach Christian perfection constantly, strongly, explicitly." "As soon as any of them find peace with God exhort them to 'go on to perfection.' The more explicitly and strongly you press all believers to aspire after full sanctification as attainable now by simple faith, the more

the whole work of God will prosper." The inspiring motto, indeed, of Methodism has been: "FULL SALVATION—NOW."

God grant that she may never forsake her motto, or depart from her lofty purpose "to spread scriptural holiness throughout all lands!"

Conclusion.

Thus largely our Churches may be seen to agree, and yet widely we may be seen to differ. Emphasis on the points upon which we agree would seem to make possible a union of all Christendom upon these great and fundamental truths, which only are essential to salvation. Yet a mere statement of the points on which we differ makes it equally apparent that, though we be servants of one God, acknowledging one Lord and Saviour, one law of righteousness, and one destiny of joy or woe forever as our deserts may be, yet organic and complete union is impossible even if desirable. A union of spirit, however, in constant recognition of our agreement on things essential, and our equal right to be called children of God, Churches of God, and ministers of Jesus Christ, is surely possible. While believing firmly, it may be, that we each are right in the points on which we differ, yet we may remember the subordinate character of these differences, and may cultivate that broad charity which forbids none because they follow not us, and which claims for ourselves no higher place

or greater part in the kingdom of God than we are willing to accord to others. Should we be tempted to do so, we may well remember the words of Jesus, "Many that are first shall be last, and the last first;" and, "They shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God," to the infinite surprise and shame of those who have limited the grace of God and have magnified outward rites, confessions, names, or claims above "the thoughts and intents of the heart."

